

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007620

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA AND PRM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JENIN CAMP REHOUSING PROJECT: A PARABLE IN  
PALESTINIAN REFUGEE POLITICS

1. (U) ConGen Jerusalem cleared this message.

2. (SBU) During a donor briefing on rehousing projects (other issues reported septel), UNRWA officials shared stories from the prolonged and difficult negotiations surrounding UNRWA's ongoing USD 27 million project to rebuild the part of Jenin refugee camp that was razed during intense fighting in April 2002. The negotiations revealed the truisms of Palestinian refugee politics: a resounding "no" to transfer or anything that could even remotely be viewed as giving up the right of return and an unwillingness on the part of political leaders to give up perceived rights for the humanitarian benefit of the community. Yet persistent discussions with ordinary camp residents led to a solution that addressed humanitarian, political and urban planning concerns, while saving face for all parties. The implications for a negotiated political solution are interesting, as the Jenin rehousing experience implies that solutions are likely to fail without the intense cultivation of support among ordinary refugees. The parable begins.

3. (SBU) As sole donor for the Jenin rehousing project, the UAE Red Crescent Society told UNRWA that it wished to reconstruct the center of Jenin camp "exactly as it was." No expense was to be spared in rebuilding three- and four-story homes in their previous location, regardless of urban planning concerns, camp residents' income level or even verifiable evidence of the refugees' preexisting housing. The UAE and the refugees themselves viewed the rehousing project as compensation, pure and simple, for everything the refugees had lost during the April 2002 incursions.

4. (SBU) Differences began to arise over the location for the new housing. Some Palestinian political factions wanted the camp center, known locally as "ground zero," left vacant as a memorial to those who died there in April 2002. Other Palestinian factions wanted the houses to be rebuilt exactly where they'd been in the densely populated center, largely, as UNRWA explained, to hinder future Israeli incursions into the camp. The majority of the 400 displaced families also wanted new housing in the razed center of the camp, for a variety of political and personal reasons, including deeply held fear of change. UNRWA, on the other hand, viewed the rehousing project as a rare opportunity to improve the infrastructure and reduce density of an overcrowded camp. (It also argued that UNRWA's long-standing agency-wide policy on new housing construction could not be ignored and refugees should only be entitled to the standard formula that results in an average shelter size of 65 square meters.) UNRWA's arguments over location (but not square meterage) held sway in discussions with the donor, and the UAE selected a plot of land outside the boundary of the refugee camp to rebuild the destroyed homes.

5. (SBU) Camp leaders of every political persuasion were outraged. A move outside the boundaries of the camp constituted a "transfer" of Palestinians from their land and the elimination of their status as refugees. Protests were held at UNRWA offices in the camp and camp leaders insisted that the project could not proceed as planned. UNRWA then began intensive counseling efforts with the displaced families to sell them on the merits of a move outside the camp boundaries and also began a search for new land closer to the camp. After several tense months, a new smaller plot of land was identified just on the boundary of the camp. UNRWA again worked closely with individual families to convince them that neither their status nor their benefits as Palestinian refugees would be affected by the move and their lives would be vastly improved by a less densely populated environment. The deal was sealed when the PA agreed that the official camp boundary would be extended to include the new housing. The majority of the displaced -- 198 families -- will be rehoused in the new plot, while others will be rehoused in a new, redesigned camp center that also will include a community center. (The new land, purchased from private owners by the UAE Red Crescent Society, is registered in the name of the Awqaf. Although the refugees will own the right to reside in the new houses, they will not own the houses, a standard practice in all Palestinian refugee camps. Property rights may well prove more complicated to resolve than the right of return in the event of a political

solution.)

16. (SBU) And so, political differences were resolved by negotiation not just among factions and political leadership, but also through intensive discussions with ordinary refugees. UNRWA officials believe that compromise would not have been possible without a concerted effort to address individual refugees' concerns; they also believe that refugees would not have accepted the final deal without having been informed of every step along the process. Their analysis echoes concerns raised in the wake of Camp David II and provides lessons to ponder in the event of progress toward a final solution.

17. (U) Visit Embassy Amman's classified website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/> or access the site through the State Department's SIPRNET home page.  
GNEHM